



**United Nations  
Environment  
Programme**



**UNEP**

Distr.  
LIMITED

UNEP(DEC)/CAR WG.24/CRP.3  
13 May 2003

English  
Original: ENGLISH

Second Meeting of the Interim Scientific,  
Technical and Advisory Committee (ISTAC) to  
the Protocol Concerning Pollution from Land-  
Based Sources and Activities in the Wider  
Caribbean (LBS)

Managua, Nicaragua, 12-16 May 2003

## **CARIBBEAN BLUE FLAG CAMPAIGN**

*Presented by*

*Caribbean Tourism Organization*



# CARIBBEAN BLUE FLAG CAMPAIGN

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In recent years, the Caribbean tourism industry has been involved in several initiatives aimed at enhancing the environmental awareness of the industry and to take advantage of the increased environmental management and marketing opportunities provided by sustainable tourism certification schemes or accreditation systems. Different sectors of the industry have responded to these opportunities, establishing alliances with international entities responsible for some of these schemes. Such is the case of the hotel sector and Green Globe through the Caribbean Alliance for Sustainable Tourism of the Caribbean Hotel Association (CAST/CHA).

However, many other areas within the tourism sector require structured environmental management and could benefit from a certification or accreditation scheme. Equally, there are several international certification schemes, pertinent to other sectors of the tourism industry, willing to expand their areas of influence to the Caribbean. This is the case of the Blue Flag certification for beaches and marinas.

## **The Blue Flag: A Beaches and Marinas Certification Scheme**

Blue Flag is a voluntary certification scheme for beaches and marinas operated in Europe by the Foundation for Environmental Education in Europe (FEEE) since 1987. It has proven to be effective as an environmental tool to enhance safety management and environmental quality of beaches and marinas. Four aspects of beach and marinas management are covered by the Blue Flag criteria:

- 1) water quality,
- 2) environmental education and information,
- 3) environmental management, and
- 4) safety and services.

The presence of the Blue Flag flying in the participant European beaches indicates to the beach users not only that the beach is clean and safe but also that environmental education programmes and information are in place and available to the general public. Every Blue Flag beach it is expected to provide a minimum of services such as:

- Clean and analyzed sea water
- Environmental Information and education
- Clean sand and solid waste disposal
- Security and first aid services
- Easy and safe access
- No unauthorized camping
- Signage and enforcement of coastal legislation
- Potable water and sanitary facilities
- No motor vehicles circulation

The beach manager works in co-ordination with local authorities (municipality, Parrish, local council) to keep the beach within the Blue Flag standards. Every year beach managers and local authorities present information on the Campaign implementation to a National Blue Flag Jury, comprised of representative of national entities responsible for the environment, tourism, planning, and community participation. The national beaches selected at the national level are then presented to the International Jury appointed by FEE. This group of experts, after the analysis of the information provided by the countries, awards the Blue Flags to the certified beaches. This process is done on an annual basis to guarantee that the Blue Flag standards are upheld every year.

## **The Blue Flag initiatives outside Europe**

In 1995, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Tourism Organization (WTO) and FEEE joined forces to assess the possibility of extending this scheme to non-European countries, incorporating local environmental, social and economic conditions. A number of steps were suggested in order to successfully adapt the scheme, the first being a feasibility evaluation. South Africa was the first country out of Europe to join Blue Flag in 2001. The organization responsible for the Campaign, FEEE,

changed its constitution from European to international and it is now recognised as the Foundation for Environmental Education, FEE.

### **The Caribbean Experience: Regional Co-ordination**

The Caribbean was the first region to complete the evaluation of the applicability of this scheme outside. UNEP, WTO and FEE invited Caribbean environment and tourism stakeholders to participate in a Feasibility Evaluation Workshop held in Puerto Rico in December 1999. At this meeting, Caribbean countries and regional agencies agreed on the importance and value of this initiative for the region, considering that the one of the most important assets of the Caribbean are our beaches. From the marketing perspective, the region recognised the advantage of utilizing a scheme that is well known Europe, a very important tourism market for the Caribbean

As a result of Puerto Rico meeting, proposed criteria for the Caribbean were prepared; and in May 2001, the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO), the Caribbean Conservation Association (CCA), and the Caribbean Alliance for Sustainable Tourism of the Caribbean Hotel Association (CAST/CHA), with the support of FEE and UNEP, set the bases for the establishment of the Blue Flag Caribbean Consortium (BFCC). They became the regional interagency team responsible for the implementation of the Caribbean Blue Flag Campaign (CBFC).

In September 2002 the BFCC co-operation agreement was formalized through a Memorandum of Understanding between CTO, CCA and CAST; and in October 2002 BFCC was formally accepted as member of FEE as required by the statutes of this organization.

### **The Caribbean Pilot Countries**

In July 2001 CTO member countries were invited to participate as Pilot countries to test the proposed regional criteria in selected beaches. Antigua & Barbuda, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Martinique, Puerto Rico and Venezuela voluntarily agreed to become part of the Pilot Phase. The Bahamas joined the group in 2002. The regional criteria gives special consideration to regional standards, including the already adopted water quality standards of the Aruba Protocol of Land Based Sources and Activities of Marine Pollution of the Cartagena Convention.

Each Pilot Country has been given the liberty to select the most suitable beaches for the testing of the regional criteria. The countries have the responsibility to identify a National Co-ordinator and to appoint the members of a National Committee, which should include representatives of relevant tourism, environmental, planning and community based organizations. So far, the Pilot Countries that have selected beaches and marinas are:

Jamaica: Long Bay Beach in Negril; Doctors Cave Bathing Club in Montego Bay; Dolphin's Cove and Dunn's River in Ocho Rios; and Frenchman's Cove and a new marina development in Port Antonio.

Puerto Rico: Monserrate Beach in Luquillo; Carolina Beach; El Escambrón Beach in the San Juan area; and Flamenco Beach in Culebra Island.

Dominican Republic: Bayahibe Beach: Casa del Mar and Club Dominicus segments

Venezuela: Adicora Beach in the Paraguaná Peninsula, estate of Falcón

The Bahamas: Our Lucaya and Old Bahama Bay Marinas, Grand Bahama Island, and Atlantis Marina, Paradise Island

The BFCC is responsible for providing technical assistance to the Pilot Countries for the implementation of the Campaign and to establish the regional collaboration with FEE and Blue Flag International. BFCC organized two Meetings of Blue Flag Caribbean Co-ordinators in 2002 and one in 2003. The first meeting has held in Bayahibe, Dominican Republic, in March, and counted with the support of the Hotels Association of La Romana-Bayahibe, which is the Blue Flag National Co-ordinator in this country. The second meeting was held in Grand Bahama Island, The Bahamas, as part of the Business Meetings of the 25<sup>th</sup> Caribbean Tourism Conference. The Ministry of Tourism of The Bahamas is Co-ordinating Blue Flag in these islands.

Other Caribbean National Co-ordinating entities are: the National Environmental Planning Agency (NEPA) of Jamaica, the Puerto Rico Tourism Company and the Vice-ministry of Tourism of Venezuela.

The third Meeting was held in Ocho Rios, Jamaica in march 2003. At this meeting, an important decision was taken to include an additional criterion in the Caribbean Blue Flag Campaign to deal with the conservation of Coral Reefs located within the area of influence of the beach management. For the development of this criterion, the BFCC will have the technical support of the UNEP Regional Co-ordinating Unit in Jamaica and its specialized agencies in the area of Coral Reefs management.

### **The Caribbean Pilot Phase**

The Caribbean Blue Flag Pilot Phase will officially begun in December 2002. Pilot Countries will display a signage at the pre-selected beaches, informing the public about the work being done at that beach to achieve the Blue Flag certificate. This Pilot Phase will run for about two years or less, depending on the countries progress in fulfilling the Caribbean Blue Flag criteria.

During the Pilot Phase, the Caribbean National Co-ordinators will continue to gain experience on how to manage the scheme. FEE and Blue Flag International will continue working with the BFCC to provide technical assistance to the countries and to co-ordinate site visit to the pilot Beaches. A second National Co-ordinators meetings will be organised in November 2003, in one of the Caribbean Pilot Countries.

Caribbean countries should identify their own National Juries before the end of the Pilot Phase. BFCC will do the same at the regional level. Once the selected Caribbean beaches are ready to be certified, the certification process will begin as is done in Europe and South Africa: from the local level to the regional and international level. BFCC will be responsible for presenting the Caribbean Beaches to the Blue Flag International Jury.

### **Achievement of the Caribbean Blue Flag Campaign**

Even though the CBFC is at its early stages, it has already catalyzed important changes in the way beaches are managed in the Caribbean. Countries have been able to organize national committees to co-ordinate individual agencies programmes towards a common goal. Beach gap analysis has been done to identify the necessary measures to make our beaches cleaner and safer. National environmental and community based NGO's are participating in the process and is expected that these organizations would grow and become strong enough to operate the Campaign in the future.

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### **Information on the member agencies of the Blue Flag Caribbean Consortium (BFCC):**

The Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) is a tourism development agency comprising 33 member governments from the French, English, Spanish and Dutch speaking Caribbean, as well as private sector organizations, with headquarters in Barbados and marketing operations in New York, London and Toronto.

The Caribbean Conservation Association (CCA) is the oldest environmental regional body in the Caribbean (38 years old), 18 Caribbean governments, 19 NGO's, several hundred individual and corporate members

The Caribbean Alliance for Sustainable Tourism (CAST) is the environmental arm of the Caribbean Hotel Association (CHA) for the promotion of environmental management actions in Caribbean hotels.

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